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## Visual Arts

# At play in the halls of power

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There's a decorum to maintain in the corridors of power, and that makes them easy to lampoon. Ann Carlson and Mary Ellen Strom's video "Sloss, Kerr, Rosenberg and Moore," on view as part of an office-themed group show, draws laughter, but there's more going on in this bold, endearing piece than just satire.

The artists observed the four titular attorneys in court and in meetings, recording their gestures and language. Carlson, a choreographer, then exaggerated those gestures and built a movement piece, which she staged in the wood-paneled hallway of a lawyers' office. The performers are the attorneys themselves, middle-aged and garbed in suits and ties.

The men stand in a circle, but they don't interact, although sometimes they move in concert. They squat and stretch; they float, arms out, like soaring hawks, then cup their hands and look searchingly into them. At one point, one of them swirls, points directly at the camera, and declares, "You are the biggest baby!"

The camera shows the group, then darts in and out for close-ups, almost making the viewer a participant in the dance. The men's faces seem unmasked. As they giggle and strut and ponder, they don't look like stone-faced or cunning lawyers, nor do they look like experienced performers (although they do occasionally perform this piece live). Rather, their expressions are vivid and sweet; they're having a blast. Strom and Carlson don't skewer these powerful men; they reveal the boys inside them.

Rebecca Chamberlain's drawings and Shellburne Thurber's photos, mounted on walls on either side of the video, set up a love-



JUDI ROTENBERG GALLERY (ABOVE)

Above: Lawyers perform in the video "Sloss, Kerr, Rosenberg and Moore" at Judi Rotenberg Gallery. It was choreographed by Ann Carlson after studying the lawyers' movements.

ly rhythm. Chamberlain's shimmering, sharp works, made with ink drained from a Bic pen and brushed over nonabsorbent vellum, focus on modernist interiors. Sleek and monochrome, they glisten on the page. The crisp lines of furniture and architecture feel almost sterile, but the ink, in blue or purple-black, is freighted with emotion.

Most of Chamberlain's compositions jut out toward the viewer. Thurber's color photographs of psychoanalysts' offices pull you in. Ornamented by art prints or kitschy sculpture, these spaces aren't as forbidding as Chamberlain's, but there's something disturbing about their formulaic sameness, with the therapist's chair usually at the head of a day bed, and a box of tissues. If Chamberlain's scenes literally can't absorb the feelings washing over them, Thurber's photos stand at the ready with tissues.

**At Work: Ann Carlson and Mary Ellen Strom, Rebecca Chamberlain, and Shellburne Thurber**

At: Judi Rotenberg Gallery,  
130 Newbury St., through Oct. 6.  
617-437-1518, judirotenberg.com